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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 0510
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 5076
RUEHBY/AMEMBASSY CANBERRA 3231
RUEHWL/AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON 3217
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI 2381
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 2674
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5561
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA 1392
RUEHLM/AMEMBASSY COLOMBO 1418
RUEHBA/AMCONSUL PERTH 1243
RUEHHK/AMCONSUL HONG KONG 3071
RHHJJPI/USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 002028

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [ID](#)
SUBJECT: SOLO -- FROM RADICAL HUB TO TOURIST HAVEN

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4 (b+d).

11. (C) SUMMARY: Solo, Central Java, for years an economic backwater and hub of radicals, is reclaiming its place as an important, vibrant Indonesian city. In an example of good governance at the local level, an entrepreneurial new mayor has worked to help curb militant Islam while promoting Solo's cultural heritage and investment possibilities. In a recent coming out party, Solo hosted hundreds of dignitaries for a world heritage conference. There are still some militants in Solo--including at the infamous Ngruki pesantren which was founded by extremist leader Abu Bakar Bashir--but the GOI now seems to have the situation under control. END SUMMARY.

A BIG EVENT IN SOLO

12. (U) Solo hosted the Euro-Asia World Heritage Cities Organization (OWHC) conference, October 25-28. The event brought hundreds of dignitaries from all over the world to Solo, a major city with a million people, to participate in the festivities. Over 700,000 residents of the city turned out for a large parade in honor of the conference on October 126. DepPol/C attended the conference for Mission.

13. (C) For a city that has had a reputation as an extremist hub, the situation in Solo was calm and the event went forward without a hitch. "See how safe Solo is?" the low-key mayor, Joko "Jokowi" Widodo, emphasized to DepPol/C while chatting in a bustling outdoor foodcourt in downtown Solo, a project which is part of his efforts to refurbish the city. Foreign Minister Hassan Wirajuda sat to his other side, wearing blue jeans and with no security in sight.

FORMERLY A HUB FOR EXTREMISTS

14. (C) When Mayor Widodo took office in 2005, Islamic Defenders Front (FPI) thugs and their cohorts regularly extorted tourist hotels by threatening "to sweep" westerners from the city. Tourist hotels closed in the historic city center. At that time, a corrupt and incompetent mayor did nothing to control the vigilantes, running Solo deeper and deeper into disrepair. Former "students" at the infamous Ngruki pesantren (Islamic boarding school)--located on Solo's outskirts and headed by Jemaah Islamiyah spiritual leader Abu

Bakar Bashir--were linked to terrorist attacks, further frightening away tourists.

¶5. (C) To improve the situation, Mayor Widodo worked with police and the central government in order to provide improved security for the area's residents. Progress was incremental, but the situation has improved and extremists are no longer ruling the streets. In addition, he started a dialogue with radical leaders, arriving at a pact that they would stop terrorizing citizens and scaring away tourists so that Solo could be revitalized. "It is just a matter of reaching out to them and building trust," said Widodo, age ¶47. In the meantime, the Ngruki pesantren continues to operate and to be involved in extremist politics. That said, activities there are closely monitored by GOI security forces.

¶6. (C) Founded in 1745, Solo has had a chequered history. In recent times, Solo's court remained loyal to the Dutch during the Indonesian Revolution while rival Yogyakarta became the seat of the rebels who emerged victorious. Due to this, Yogyakarta was rewarded, becoming its own special district, while the GOI effectively punished Solo, which was absorbed into the larger province of Central Java. Yogyakarta's sultanate was also officially recognized while Solo's lost that status. In the 1960s, Solo was a stronghold of leftists and became a center of anti-communist bloodletting. Muslim groups then began to gain strength in the area, culminating--as noted--in the activities of extremists in the early 2000's.

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SOLO AS A CENTER OF CULTURE

¶7. (C) As part of his reform effort, Mayor Widodo also put in place Solo's first modern city development plan on the theme of "Solo's Future is Solo's Past." He is preserving and revitalizing the city's ancient city center while pushing new development to the suburbs. Tourism is up as two new major hotels were opened this year with occupancy rates now at 90 percent, and seven more slated to open next year. DepPol/C discussed with Widodo ideas for strengthening ties with the U.S.

¶8. (C) Widodo also decided that Solo would be Indonesia's "city of performing arts." A successful furniture exporter for 19 years before being elected, Widodo also took stock of his inventory: 440 performing arts schools for music, dance and theater--outshining even its more glamorous neighbor, Yogyakarta. Moreover, Solo is famed for traditional batik, puppets and other local handicrafts, not to mention ancient palaces, nearby temples, quaint alleyways, and broad tree-lined avenues. Widodo worked to publicize this and stimulate further cultural activity. He has plans to build both a convention center and has set aside land to build what he hopes will be a world class opera house.

¶9. (U) He lobbied the OWHC for two years to convince it to hold the 2008 Euro-Asian event in Solo. A major undertaking, it went off flawlessly, with four days of non-stop exhibits and workshops promoting Solo's cultural heritage. Widodo subcontracted out most of the work to the city's most talented professionals to ensure a quality product.

A REVIVED CITY

¶10. (C) At this point, Solo finally appears to be turning a corner. In a city once virtually moribund because of bad leadership and radical hooliganism, Solo is an example of how an elected local leader can quickly institute reform under democracy and Indonesia's new decentralized system.

¶11. (C) Solo is also a symbol of just how far Indonesia has come in the effort to fight terrorism and extremism. There are still some extremists in Solo's region, but there number

is quite small and they seem increasingly marginalized.

(Note: The situation in Solo is due to be tested in the near-term if the GOI executes the Bali bombers. Sympathizers of the terrorists reside at the Ngruki pesantren and they presumably could plan rallies, etc. The GOI says it has the situation under control, however.)

HUME